

Fostering Adjustment: The Role of International Student Societies in Malaysian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

International students often face greater challenges than local students during their time on campus, particularly in academic, psychological, and sociocultural aspects of adjustments. These problematic issues make them more fragile and vulnerable compared to their local friends. In Malaysia, majority public universities established an International Student Society which provides platforms for connection, event organization and support international student development. This study explores the role of International Student Society in supporting international student's adjustment, the activities organized and international students' perception on their participation in activities in supporting academic, psychological, and sociocultural aspect of adjustment. Using qualitative research approach, this study used document analysis and semi-structured interviews involved two group of participants consisted of six international students and six International Student Society officers from six public universities in Malaysia. Result shows that International Student Society are responsible in managing five aspects of international students including organize activities to provide support in term of academic, psychological and sociocultural aspects. International students' participation in activities foster connections and enhances adjustment in three key areas: academic, psychological, and sociocultural. In summary, the presence of International Student Society at each public university in Malaysia is a crucial strategy for supporting international students' adjustment in the host country.

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Contribution/Originality: This study enhances the understanding of international student adjustment experiences in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Malaysia.

It specifically highlights the role of International Student Societies in improving adjustment experiences across academic, sociocultural, and psychological dimensions.

1. Introduction

It always come to our concerns that International Students (IS) are facing greater challenges than local students during their stay in campus especially within the three aspects of adjustments: academic, psychological, and sociocultural (Ahmed & Mohamed, 2021; Ahrari et al., 2019; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Deni et al., 2021; Lashari et al., 2018; Sherry et al., 2010; Syed Sahuri, 2018). IS are reported having struggles in dealing with local food, local weather, new academic setting, local languages, and many other aspects with additional threat being far away from family and friends and completely alone in host country. In some situations, they also describe as vulnerable and fragile due to their inability to adapt to a new academic environment, psychological and sociocultural compared to their local friends (Lashari et al., 2018; Moni et al., 2021; Sherry et al., 2010; Syed Sahuri, 2018).

Focusing on Malaysian context, all public universities in Malaysia has established an International Students Society (ISS). Their establishments are not just to help with visa and passport matters, nor to just manage the students' placement in host country. In fact, the initial purpose of their formation is to work as a community or a "new big family" to welcome and support ISS during their stay in the host country. ISSs provide platform for ISs to connect, they offer support for those who are in need, organize events and help to adjust with new campus environments. Number of literatures prove that the presence of social support such as ISS will help boost IS's sense of belonging to the campus, reduce psychological distress, promoting for better social interactions, enhance their academic experience, and thus prevent IS's withdrawal and retention from campus (Flowers et al., 2010; Foubert & Urbanski, 2015; Hawkins, 2015; Lashari et al., 2018; Moni et al., 2021; Susan Gieg, 2017; Webber et al., 2013; Wilcox et al., 2005).

1.1. Research Objectives

This study explores the process of IS's adjustment by examining the role of ISS and IS's during the adjustment period to the host country as follows:

- i. To explore the role of ISS in supporting IS's adjustment in academic, psychology and sociocultural aspects.
- ii. To explain the program or activities organized by ISS in supporting IS's adjustment in academic, psychology and sociocultural aspects.
- iii. To explore IS's perception on their participation in ISS program or activities at the host country.

2. Literature Review

The enrolment number of IS to Malaysian universities has been reported increased from time to time. Referring to Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) in Malaysia, about 159,545 ISs are registered studying in Malaysia in the year of 2023 (MoHE, 2023). MoHE also put target to receive until 250,000 IS in the year of 2030 (Packer, 2024). However, despite a hopeful increase in the number of IS, some ISs were reported dropped out from their studies and relocated elsewhere outside Malaysia, while some others were reported having adjustment issues during their stay in the host country (Arandas, Loh &

Sannusi, 2019; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Rahim et al., 2018; Singh, 2020; Sulong & Othman, 2020).

Literatures reported that common challenges faced by IS as early as they arrived to the host country such are difficulties in dealing with immigration and visa procedures, problem to communicate due to different language and accent, pressure in doing well academically, challenges to adapt with local food and local weather, different academic system, financial issues and many more (Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Arandas, Loh & Sannusi, 2019; Deni et al., 2021; Rahim et al., 2018; Sulong & Othman, 2020; Talebloo & Baki, 2013). Current adjustments issues among ISs in Malaysia has been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Common Issues Faced by ISs in Malaysia

Academic Issues	Psychological Issues	Sociocultural Issues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different academic system - Different teaching method (Alavi & Mansor, 2011; Yassin et al., 2020) - Academic courses thought in Malay (Rahim et al., 2018) - Inability to perform well in academic due to sociocultural issues such are weather, food and accommodation (Ahmad et al., 2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loneliness, culture shock, headaches (Mesidor & Sly, 2016) - Discrimination and social isolation (Arandas, Loh & Sannusi, 2019) - Insomnia, nerves, stress after arrival in the host country (Li et al., 2017) - Distress symptoms, anger aggression, high-risk behaviours, isolation and disengagement (Mattanah, 2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty to engage to the society (Abdullah et al., 2010) - Challenges to adapt to local food (Abdullah et al., 2010; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007) - Challenges to adapt to local weather lead to fever (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Rahim et al., 2018) - Language barrier due to different slang (Arandas et al., 2019; GulRaihan & Sandaran, 2018; Sherry et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2015)

In certain situations, they might face single issue at one time, but usually, issues faced by ISs are described as intertwined where one issues will lead to other issues as well (Schartner & Young, 2016). For example, fail to engage to the society will lead to social isolation and disengagement and resulted to inability to perform well in academic. These problematic situations lead ISs to experience loneliness, lower sense of belonging, homesickness, culture shock, low motivation to study and not perform well in academic or worst lead to suicidal attempt or dropout from campus (Arandas et al., 2019; Lashari et al., 2018; Schartner, 2014; Othman, 2015; Withey et al., 2014).

As a newcomer to the university and the country itself, ISs surely in need of social support to help them with better adjustment. Scholars proved that social support help enhance coping and resilience level of ISs, reduce stress, act as a buffer to psychological issues, boost sense of belonging which will result in better academic achievement and faster adjustment in host country (Sabouripour & Roslan, 2018, Brisset et al., 2010; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Chuah & Singh, 2016; Foubert & Urbanski, 2015; Lashari et al., 2018, Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Matic & Russell, 2020; Syed Sahuri, 2018, Hawkins, 2015).

In the meantime, each public universities in Malaysia have an official ISS under university and campus management. Their name might be different, but their function, vision and mission are still same which to represent the voices of ISs, provide support and act as a platform for them to mingle around (Awang et al., 2014; Brereton, 2019;

Ebede, 2015; Flowers et al., 2010; Foubert & Urbanski, 2015; Hawkins, 2015). It is believed that ISS can act as the best social support to IS, as they are authorized enough to assist and guide ISs when needed. In addition, they are also available in campus most of the time.

Previous studies have also highlighted positive effects of IS involvement in ISS activities. ISs who participate in these activities often experience a stronger sense of belonging, enhanced academic development, improved retention and persistence on campus, and a reduction in psychological issues such as anxiety, nervousness, headaches, and depression. Additionally, they tend to show greater psychosocial development compared to ISs who do not engage in ISS activities (Gallagher & Gilmore, 2013; Hawkins, 2015; Lashari et al., 2018; Nguyen & Larson, 2017; Susan Gieg, 2017; Webber et al., 2013). In conclusion, it is believed that the presence of ISS is unquestionably play a crucial role to ISs and associates with better adjustment experience in academic, psychological, and sociocultural.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This qualitative study was conducted using multiple case study research design. Since the majority of research of ISs adjustment are carried out using a quantitative method (Ahmed & Mohamed, 2021; Al Dhaheri et al., 2021; Alyoubi et al., 2021; Chiara et al., 2021; Michael et al., 2021), it is necessary to explore and understand the actual state IS and the role of ISS in helping ISs during their adjustment period in the host country. It is believed that the data collected would lead to unique findings with the use of a multiple case study research design.

3.2. Participants

The method of purposive sampling employed to construct the sample of the research. Using this method, participants were chosen based on their experience and expertise in IS's experience. Referring to Sharma (2017), purposive sampling is effective in this situations because it gives the researcher with a wide choice of sample to choose from. In the other hand, it can also help researcher to come with a broad conclusion from the study. Hence, the targeted sample universities should have these characteristics: (1) a Malaysian public university; and (2) has the highest IS according to their zone. Thus, six public institutions consist in each zone, the Northern, Central, Eastern, Western, Southern, and Sabah and Sarawak zone have been selected for this study (Table 2).

Table 2: Selected Universities According to Zones

University	Zone	Current IS in Campus	Current Students in Campus
University A	Western	6,476	30,870
University B	Southern	3,628	31,992
University C	Central	3,356	32,142
University D	Northern	2,451	31,587
University E	Eastern	848	12,411
University F	Sabah & Sarawak	415	16,377

Source: MOHE (2019)

In qualitative research, the number of participant is subjective. Patton (2002), mentioned that the number of participants interviewed is not an issue in qualitative studies because no one specific rule can be applied to determine the sample size of interviewees (Macgregor, 2006; Mokmin Basri, 2012; Patton, 2002). From 6 targeted universities, 3 participants will be selected consist of IS and ISS Officers at each university. The selection of IS and ISS officers is based on their potential to answer the research questions (Table 3).

Table 3: Number of Participants According to Universities

University	IS	IS Officer	Total Participants
University A	2	1	3
University B	2	1	3
University C	2	1	3
University D	2	1	3
University E	2	1	3
University F	2	1	3

Twelve selected IS have been chosen according to the following characteristics: (1) Undergraduate IS, (2) and currently staying in the host country during the COVID 19 situation. In the other hand, the officers selected for this study are chosen based on their position in ISS as a resource person and that can provide information about IS adjustment experience.

3.3. Instrument

Document analysis and semi-structured interview are methods used to collect information for this study.

3.3.1. Semi structured Interview

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants: IS and officers of ISS using two ways: (i) face to face and (ii) online using Microsoft Teams platform. Participants were briefed regarding this study and asked for their consent before the session start.

3.3.2. Document Analysis

For document analysis, information related to COVID 19 guideline, information, procedure to IS were analyzed. Other than that, list of activities conducted, photos and videos gathered from ISS website page and social media related to programs with IS during COVID 19 is also included to understand the role of university in supporting IS during COVID 19 situation.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data gathered analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis enables the researcher to see and understand collective or shared meanings and experiences by concentrating on the meaning across a data set. Following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the data was initially familiarized by listening and reading persistently, followed by code generation, themes search,

reviewing and report generation. ATLAS.ti software is used during the procedure to analyse data. The personal information of the participants was kept confidential.

4. Results

Results were discussed based on research questions. Codes and themes were generated to show the evidence of the themes.

4.1. The role of ISS in supporting IS’s adjustment in academic, psychology and sociocultural aspects

Results indicate that there are five roles of ISS in campus: a) Visa and Administration, b) Guidance and Mediation, c) Logistic and Facilities, d) Supervision of IS’s Club and e) Welfare and Emergency.

4.1.1. Visa and Administration

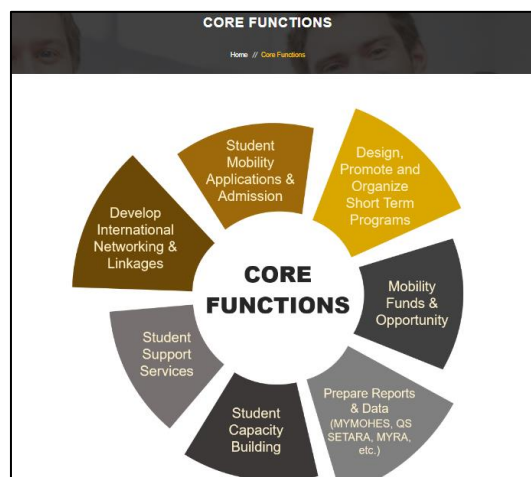
This research found that all participated universities are responsible in helping ISs in term of visa and administration. These are also shown on their official website pages as reported in [Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#).

Figure 1: Visa Unit at University E.

FUNCTION OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS		
NO.	NAME OF UNIT	FUNCTIONS
1	International Student Visa Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage international student pass applications
2	Advisory & Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out activities / programmes for international students Assist in orientation programmes Manage international student welfare Manage International Gala Night / Cultural activities
3	International Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an International Student Handbook Maintain CCIU website Activity calendar for International Students
4	Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage English / Malay language courses for international students and their families Manage student mobility and exchange programmes Manage international student undergraduate applications
5	Financial & Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CCIU administration

Source: University E

Figure 2: Visa Service is Put Under Application & Admission Role at University C.



Source: University C

Most of the interviewed participants emphasized that the primary role of ISS is managing administration and visa procedures of ISs. Two interviewed ISS Officers stated that ISS Offices are responsible for handling the registration and visa process for ISs.

We work to ensure their applications and visa process are smooth (ISS Officer, University E).

And also, our task of course is about the visa and passport among the other things (ISS Officer, University F).

ISs are very concerned about their visas, and in some cases, visa issues are the main reason for their visit to the ISS Office.

I think for the first year, I just came here for the visa matters. So that is the only reason (IS, University B).

In the first year, I have no idea who they are (ISS) but in the second year, you know, I need to renew my visa and submit some documents so that is how I knew them. I never went to ask ISS Office about things that related to academic. But I did ask them about visa (IS, University A).

In addition, ISS is responsible for administrative tasks, assisting with registration process and collaborating with other university departments to develop policies especially for ISs. One of IS participants noted that ISS helped during registration.

So, there are like providing one room for 3 ISS members and with 5 IS then helping them with the registration process and if there is any problem so they (ISS) will help them to settle (IS, University C).

And then on the other role of ISS, are other experiences where we need to deal a lot with faculty and the university management because we want to see an increasing IS on campus and we want to see an increasing IS mobility – the students going out and other students coming in. so we were with the faculty and management to create policies to create energy motivation for faculties so the distinct can move along (ISS Officer, University E).

4.1.2. Guidance and Mediation

In this study, majority participants mentioned that ISSs also play a significance role in giving guidance and mediation to ISs. Majority participants among ISs also genuinely described that they feel comfortable in asking questions or seeking for advice from ISS Officers due to their close relationship with each other. The topic that has been asked are varies. In fact, ISs are asking from very general things like method to login to campus Wi-Fi, nearest shop to find necessities and specific and serious things related to their academic matters, psychological conditions, and sociocultural aspects. This can be understood through quotes below:

Some others (IS) are also come to see us (ISS) to get advice regarding academic, or anything general that related to their life (ISS Officer, University C).

Sometimes they come and ask advice about financial, counselling, although we are not doing counselling, but IS need counselling in a different way. The IS come because they're confused about choices and about life here (ISS Officer, University A).

The frequently asked questions will always be about where they can get access to the food, the important places of the interest like the bank, the shopping mall, internet of course, and whatnot. So, these are the questions that normally they ask (ISS Officer, University F).

By playing their role as a guider and mediator, ISS Officers are giving advice and encouragement to ISs with the hope that they can have better understanding of the host country and thus, lead them to have better experience in campus. This has been mentioned by an ISS Officer, during the interview session as quoted below:

We also work to make sure they enjoy their time here and choose they have, getting into participating a lot of things so there's a lot of opportunity for them to participating local things, we assist with that (ISS Officer, University E).

I think in handling IS is to introduce to the different culture, the different community that we have and also to make them aware about the do's and the don'ts (ISS Officer, University F).

We need to educate them for the new society they are coming to, about the culture, knowledge and all of these things. Then, by the time I think around three to four months, then we will let them adjust by themselves. That is see and believing, they have to face the reality by themselves (ISS Officer, University A).

However, when it comes to specific things, ISS Officer, more or less will act as a mediator and channel ISs to the expert based on their concerns about. For example, if ISs are looking for consultation regarding their academic matters, ISS Officers will channel them to the faculty or academic department for them to get best advice from the authorized persons. This also has been mentioned several times during the interview as follows:

We will be a mediator when it comes to academic matters. Because, sometimes, we also try to help the students with their academic problems. Because in this campus, we have the program called "Mentor Mentee", they have their own academic advisor, appointed among the lecturer in that faculty or program. So, every semester, they have to meet at least once. (ISS Officer, University F).

Somebody (IS) is mentally disturbed? How would I (ISS) give advice? I sent him to the counselling department (ISS Officer, University A).

So, in term of taking care of their mental health, we provide help to them. But if the problems is very detrimental, then we will refer them to our counselling unit for their evaluation (ISS Officer, University F).

ISSs give their full attention to any rising issue and complaint by IS. When it comes to things that are not under their supervision, for instance, academic and psychology, ISS will direct them to the related office. One of the interviewed officers shared that, ISS will bring IS's issue to the attention of top management if the same issue keeps repeating and unsolved.

So for us, we got the complaints from the students. And so one of our role is then, we will do a better research, to find out the better policy, what are the university practice, argue that if we think that is the good idea but if we bring that to management they may say it can't be done. But we still do some research and bring this issue to management on behalf of the students (ISS Officer, University E).

So there is also case, where there is one IS who is sick and not afford to pay for the hospital bills, eventough the insurance company has paid for some amount, but still it has balance and that IS didn't have enough money to pay. So, in this situation, what we can do to help is, we will help him in communicating this issue with embassy or consulate. So, usually the consulate people will give advice regarding the situation or financial help for that student (ISS Officer, University D).

4.1.3. Logistic and Facilities

In this study, participants also discussed logistic and facilities as one of the roles of ISS. Logistics was highlighted by all participants as the preparation and accommodation that provided to ISs especially during the travelling period to register to host country. Two interviewed participants emphasized the airport pick up service that was provided by ISS.

Before I arrived in Malaysia, I talked to them, they arranged accommodation, and they said, we can arrange the pickup service also but although I didn't took the pick up service from airport, I had one senior who know me before, and he pick me from airport (IS, University B).

They will assist the IS from the moment they came in and sometimes they will also come to pick them up from the airport (IS, University B).

And so what we do is, we form a committee. Then, this committee will contact these students (IS) you know in their countries, we asked them when are you coming, then they called it pre departure flight, so once they are confirm, we will form a committee, and once we know about that, then we will arrange the transportation and the committee will be there at the airport, to welcome the students (ISS Officer, University A).

Other than that, the facilities role of ISS in this study is understood as any equipment that is been provided to the ISs. At each university, a space for ISs is provided for them

to spend time and mingle around with other IS community. Three participants among officers of ISSs stressed about provided space during the interviews. Even though the names mentioned were different, they are referring to the same thing and the purposes are also similar.

Actually Global Hub is a place and it is like a one stop centre for IS. So they can come, if they want to do their visa, they want to ask about the welfare, they want to talk to our international staff, or they want to meet among themselves, they are free to use that space. It is like a one stop meeting centre or one stop service centre for the students (ISS Officer, University F).

In fact, we also provide a space specially for IS at each residential college for them to do their activities. For example, now they have English Enhancement Session activity. So for me, that space is very good. so they can improve their language, they can socialize and help solving their issues (ISS Officer, University D).

Further research on their website and social media accounts also found the spaces provided that can be used by ISs as has been mentioned during the interview sessions. This can be referred to [Figure 3](#) and [Figure 4](#).

Figure 3: Provided space (known as Global Hub) for ISs at University F.



Figure 4: Facilities Provided at International Student's Lounge, University D.

Student Lounge

Among the facilities provided at each Student Lounge are:

- Computer room equipped with Desktop PC
- Smart TV
- Reception staff
- Easy access to Wifi
- CCTV Security System
- Door Security System Access
- Printing and photocopying facilities.

4.1.4. Supervision of IS's Club

This study found that, organizations that are established among ISs, either country-based or general, are placed under the supervision of ISS. The listed clubs among ISs at each university are shown in Table 4. Data is gained from interview sessions with all participants.

Table 4: Clubs for IS in Campus

University	ISS	International Students Club	International Student Buddies	Country Chapter
University A	/	X	X	/
University B	/	/	X	/
University C	/	/	/	X
University D	/	/	/	/
University E	/	X	X	X
University F	/	X	/	X

It is understandable that each university has their own practices and approaches. Due to some issues and preferences, only University D has all 4 types of associations for ISs including the ISS office. Additionally, only three universities have country chapter organizations in their campus: University A, University B and University D. Other universities do not encourage the establishment of country-based association due to political issues and conflict among certain countries. One of the officers mentioned that:

Okay, we do not encouraged them to have their own society because of their issue that I have been mention to you just now. Sometimes, they might have an issues among themselves. That is one of the thing. And that is not among the local people you know because once you get all the countries come in, sometimes among the Bangladesh and Pakistan, and sometimes among the India and Pakistan, Nigeria and Pakistan, you know sometimes they have their own cultural problems among themselves. Not Malaysians, but among themselves (ISS Officer, University F).

Based on the analysis, the differences between all associations can be understood from their objectives. Even though all of them share the similarities to serve the IS, each one of them have distinct criteria that can be recognized from Table 5.

Table 5: Distinctive Clubs for IS on Campus

Type of Association	Objective(s)
ISS	To facilitate IS's need in the form of visa and administration, guidance and mediator, emergency, logistics and facilities, supervision of IS' Club and welfare. One of the University departments and manage by Officers.
International	Association that represents current IS on campus.

Students Club	Main objectives are to represent ISs, assist ISS and being mediator between ISS and IS's.
International Student Buddies	Promote better wellbeing of IS on campus. Can be joined by any students on campus.
Country Chapter	An association that represents IS with similar country. It can be established with a minimum number of 20 people from similar country.

Generally, any program organized by IS Club will be funded by ISS. However, there was also a participant who mentioned that ISS will provide funds for any programs that include IS, even though it is not organized by IS Club.

And ISS give support to this event in terms of money (IS, University B).

They used to give us funds if we have plans for IS like there was a time when we want to do mural because we as design student we are required to have mural art at our faculties. so at that time, ISS did provide us funds to buy things like paints, brushes and all (IS, University F).

4.1.5. Welfare and Emergency

It is acknowledged that ISS is responsible for sustaining IS's welfare during their stay in host country and especially in university. This study found that welfare is defined as any aspect that influences the well-being of ISs and this has been mentioned by most of the participants during interview sessions:

We (ISS) give all type of support that IS need in term of welfare or anything to complete his education in this university. That's what I am telling you. There is no specification for that. Anything. That's what the International Office for. So everything goes under any international student's life should come here (ISS Officer, University A).

We look at their welfare also in general (ISS Officer, University E).

Academic, faculties already look over there so ISS mostly will focus on wellbeings and welfare of IS (ISS Officer, University B).

HEP and ISS are quite same, the programs that have been organized are more focuses on welfare and managing students and also they have one section that only look for local students so it is balance with us as we have ISS to only look for us (IS, University F).

And usually the academic support is be given by the faculty, the ISS is only for welfare, and other activities (IS, University C).

Some officers also share their experience in helping ISs with issues that affect their wellbeing. Issues discussed are varied such are financial problems, misunderstandings with lecturers, criminal case and emergency situations.

Financial support means when students have a very critical financial support, let say you cannot eat. We will help them, tell what you can do, what you can apply for. You can apply for zakat. You can apply for federal funds, you can apply for takaful, we have something called takaful project, and it's not the insurance project. Takaful project means to... you know, to support each other (ISS Officer, University A).

Our students (IS) they have miscommunication with the supervisors and so they start to get lost in their work and they need someone to talk to the faculty on their behalf because students doesn't have that much power right, they feel like faculty might not help them. So when they came to us, we will speak about it. Then we get the story from the other side (ISS Officer, University E).

My challenging experience is when I need to settle the documentation of death report of an IS. We need to contact the embassy, the hospital. And it will take quite long time. We need to stay back at the hospital, waiting for the corpse and the post mortem report. Other than that, we also need to prepare the report, and speak on behalf of the university, to the family, the embassy, the student division unit and all. Besides, we also need to prepare the corpse to bring back to the home country. I experienced this one time when I just appointed in this department. The student passed away because of accident (ISS Officer, University D).

In conclusion, it can be said that the significant role of ISS in helping ISs in Malaysia is related to their basic needs and interest. As the closest party to the ISs, all their concerns have been put into consideration especially in academic, psychological, and sociocultural aspects. However, it is understandable that an ISS Officer didn't have enough authorities to give consultation or advice that not related to their field such are academic and psychological aspects. Thus, they are playing their role well by channeling ISs to the right party and authorize person.

4.2. The program or activities organized by ISS in supporting IS's adjustment in academic, psychology and sociocultural aspects

Results indicates that ISSs are organizing activities to help the adjustment of ISs. In fact, it is found that ISSs also works with other departments from time to time with objectives to promote international engagement and help with better adjustment among ISs. The activities organized can be divided into 4 categories as described in the following [Table 6](#).

Table 6: Summary of Activities Organized By ISS

Activity	Organizer	Level
a) Festival celebration	ISS with support from HEP and ISB	University
b) Buddies Program	ISS with support from ISB	University
c) Cultural Festival	ISS	University

d) Weekly Gathering

ISS

University

It is understood from this study that ISSs is one of ISS's biggest priorities. This was also clearly revealed in their objective of establishment as has been discussed before. With that objective, and ISSs being their biggest concern, ISSs then continuously organize activities from time to time to ensure better adjustment experience among ISSs during their stay in host country. This can be understood from the list of programs that were recorded during the interview sessions and the collected documents that were analyzed.

4.2.1. Festival Celebration

Majority participants reported that ISSs are organizing celebrations for main festivals in Malaysia. For example, Eid Fitri, Eid Adha and Chinese New Year Celebrations. These were mentioned during the interview sessions:

And then every celebration, for example, Eid Fitri, Eid Adha and also during Ramadan, there is celebrations and the food pack will be given to them, but because of the COVID last year, we didn't do that. But previously yes. And the other celebration like Chinese New Year (ISS Officer, University F).

And then, we also have program for Eidul Adha. We will sacrifice cows and that thing related. This is normally we will get donation from Germany. There is an organization from Germany and there are Turkish based organization. So basically, it is an NGO based in Germany, they give a lot of things to many countries and including Malaysia. Even I can say, they provide more than cows for the university, so sometimes they give 23-24 cows for IS (ISS Officer, University A).

And many IS couldn't go back to celebrate Eid with family so ISS organized a celebration so that we feel like we are at home. And they also took us to meet with Queen. So it was really a great program and I feel grateful for being part of them (ISS) because it make us feel like we are at home (IS, University B).

In certain institutions, ISS also encourage and assist ISSs to celebrate their hometown Independence Day.

They (IS) will celebrate their country independence day. So for example, Independence Day for China is in October, so the Chinese students want to celebrate. So they will collaborate with the ISS and we will assist them by approving their program and give them the venue. We also encourage them to do so for them to feel like home. Even though they are not in their home country, China but they are in Malaysia, and they still can celebrate it (ISS Officer, University A).

4.2.2. Buddies Program

This study found that to expedite the adjustment of ISSs, ISSs also initiates regular activities combining ISSs and local students namely Buddies Program. ISSs are given the opportunities to mingle around with them where local students will usually play their

role as facilitator or pair to each ISSs. Several participants mentioned this activity during interviews:

We have Global Buddies platform, which they is actually not IS, but their role is like ambassador that promote the integration between local and IS (ISS Officer, University C).

And during that event (Buddies Program), we have more than 200 buddies all over the world and it was nice because we have three venues, which are University Museum, International House and Buddies Room. So it was very big event and enjoyable moment. Eventhough it was organized virtually because of COVID (IS, University C).

There were not much buddies to organize it but this time they have much buddies, they came and did all the cultural performances and so yah those are all very interactive and nice (IS, University B).

Referring to this current situation (COVID 19), we also organize a virtual orientation, focusing only to the IS. And within that session, we also include our buddies, to share their experience with the new IS, so that they can learn and not very nervous to start their journey (ISS Officer, University C).

4.2.3. Cultural Festival

This study found that ISSs are actively organizing and providing sociocultural based activities towards ISSs. A variety of programs related to culture had been organized. This has been recorded during the interviews as follows:

We have the activity name FESKO. It is like a cultural festival here and each country need to present their culture during that festival like a dance or something that related. The event itself just one day but it took longer time for the preparation (IS, University B).

We have an event call UMICEF. This one, usually there will be stall around from all the countries, showing their food, culture and all (IS, University C).

I have attended Citrawarna event. And it was one of the beautiful things. It is like not necessarily only for international student's thing. I mean it is also for locals. So, the program is like cultural performance from all international. There will be like a drama, singing, and all (IS, University F).

The "Jom Week", and that is like a long week for that event and they will do like a lot of activities, and one of good activities, is like they are doing the fasting thing like to celebrate Muslim culture. Like the people from the different culture, they will do a vlog like on how they are doing, their experience and what are their experience on fasting, so there was a video last year also, there are five peoples and they will share on what are their experience. Like some of them is chinese, and they are all fasted and they

will do like a vlog. And describe how they are fasting throughout the day (IS, University C).

Other than that, we also have global Ummatic Festival. This one is to celebrate the culture of IS. We have more than 50 nationalities from different countries and it also depend to the student's alumni in that country either they come back or not, Africa, Middle East. Latin America, Australia, South Continent, with these students altogether, we organized this Global Ummatic Festival. Which we have been doing this for almost 15-16 years. Every year we do. We will call for the students to display their culture, and it will be like an exhibition (ISS Officer, University A).

The names for their programs might differ, but all programs organized promote the sociocultural activities for better sociocultural adjustment. The cultural events will usually take at least a full day up to one week.

4.2.4. Weekly Gathering

Other than connect with ISs through formal activities, ISSs also initiate informal weekly gathering for ISs. This was organized in order to know the condition of ISs, listen to their concerns if any and provide them with spaces and consultation if needed. Two participants mentioned during interviews:

Sometimes, The ISS Office will also organized like free food such as pizza, cakes to IS. This will usually happen in Friday. They can come during their free time to the office (ISS Officer, University D).

We also have social activities like gathering, barbecue, or anything like this (IS, University B).

4.3. IS's perception on their participation in ISS activities at the host country.

It is no doubt that connecting ISs with community and being active with activities organized at campus level, can give positive effect, and help them in better adjustment in host country. In this study, ISs believe that they have experienced positive effects by joining ISS activities within three aspects of adjustment which are academic, psychology and sociocultural. Three positive perceptions gained from ISs are: a) Better Academic Performance, b) Self-Empowerment, and c) Better Sociocultural Adjustment.

4.3.1. Better Academic Performance

By practicing active life on campus, many participants among ISs shared their experience in getting higher rank in their academic. Several participants mentioned:

But then, after the first semester until now, it is pretty good and I am in a higher rank of CGPA. And yes, if you actually participate in co-curricular activity, it is also good for your future like when you want to make a network, and the company for you to apply (IS, University C).

I still can maintain the CGPA and actually last year is better than before, Alhamdulillah. I think once you make yourself busier, and for my case Ia

am joining ISB, and then you can make best decision for yourself (IS, University B).

I have a good experience in academic. And yes, definitely, it help me to adjust better in sociocultural and also help to adjust with the time (IS, University D).

And Alhamdulillah I got good grade during that time (IS, University B).

And my CGPA never drop (IS, University A).

Participating in ISS's activities also positively influence their English Language. Both participants, ISS Officer and ISs had mentioned this during interviews:

There is one IS from China and his English at first is really bad. But then, towards the end, he manage to speak in English very much better and with confident. So, those kind of things that remarks my happy moment during working here in this centre (ISS Officer, University D).

Yes, I think I feel more confident in English after joining the programs (IS, University D).

Because our office, when we do the activity, all of them was conducted in English or if not English, it must be in Arabic. So it is between these two. So that is why, some students have difficulties, such student from Guinea, Senegal because they speak French. And I also speak a little bit in French also. Once they come here then they should join the activities, and it help them with better language (ISS Officer, University A).

4.3.2. Self-Empowerment

Moreover, this study found that IS are inclined to experience emotional improvement by joining ISS activities. They even expressed their happiness of having those moments during the interview session by smiling and excitedly showing the pictures of the activities.

I am not join Citrawarna but I attended and have seen it. And it was one of the beautiful things (IS, University F).

For that program, I have been asked to wear Yemeni traditional dress and then we take pictures. It was fun (IS, University D).

So there are something supporting of ISS which is we are looking on something to do even more. And that is the time when most of the students are involved and we encouraged ISS to do something like that and it was a support to me, a big support (IS, University F).

I really love ISC when they conduct this kind of workshop. It is like we are all students and sometimes we are facing difficulties. So, we are feel like they are someone or one organization that who really care and support us. We feel like we are alien you know. Because we are as IS sometimes, we feel like we are foreigners you know even though we may feel like

there are some organization from all of international countries, to be honest, we feel like there are someone who really support and care for us (IS, University D).

Because if you just study, it is quite boring. After some time, you will stress, stress, stress, then there is the program, you just come and participate, to have fun. It helps you to relieve (IS, University B).

My participation in all programs and clubs really help me to adjust better in here (IS, University D).

I adjusted by just follow the events, the programs that have been organized, I try to make myself busy (IS, University B).

4.3.3. Better Sociocultural Adjustment

It is confirmed that their participation in campus activities is helping them to have better experience of university life and thus, expedite the sociocultural adjustment. Most participants expressed their delight and excitement when sharing how joining activities really helps them with better adjustment. In fact, this has been mentioned by both parties, ISs and ISS Officers during interviews. They mentioned:

Yes, I have been more familiar with local culture after join the programs. I found out that it will be quite hard if you just go and read book about culture to understand Malaysian people and it is more better for you to participate in the programs itself and it will give you knowledge about what they do, how they live and all (IS, University B).

ISS committee and ISS programs itself really did help me a lot to adjust in sociocultural (IS, University B).

They are doing things that certainly help us explore a bit more and adapted to the culture. And the interaction that happen with local during that time is certainly deep. And yeah I can say that ISS is doing something to help us (IS, University F).

Yes, they (ISS) do teaches us a lot of things about their (local) culture so that we know and it helps us to adjust to their culture (IS, University C).

We keep in touch with some of the alumni and so that's why we know that those experience does help them with the survival in this campus during their stay. This program does help in their adjustment. It does help them to boost like their sense of belonging (ISS Officer, University F).

Yes, usually, IS who join programs, they adjust very fast. Because as I said, they are in the committee, so they adjust faster and they are not keep just to themselves (ISS Officer, University A).

IS who participated in programs are usually more approachable, easy to adapt, usually they are an active students, or if even they are not an active students, but atleast they knew about current situation in campus, the regulations, the people, who is the people in charge for this type of issue

and so on. And usually, this category of students, they didn't experience great amount of stress. Yes, they will have stress, but not until affect their psychological health and all (ISS Officer, University B).

5. Conclusion

It is expected that a student will face difficulties during their studies. However, it is not commonly acknowledged that ISs are consistently contend with the level of difficulty that is twofold as compared to their local friends. Hence the ISSs, in this study, are found to play a crucial role on each IS registered on their campus. Through various activities that has been organized, ISS provides comprehensive support that helps ISs navigate the challenges associated with studying in host country.

In the beginning, this research has mentioned that the three adjustment aspects of ISs are described as intertwined where one aspect can potentially influence the others. This study confirms that statement, as ISs who participated in this study are found to have better sociocultural, psychological, and academic adjustment by joining ISS activities. For example, by attending sociocultural activities on campus, it helps them to have better sociocultural adjustment, which then will lead them to feel attached to the university, boost their confidence and consequently, result in better motivation to study and better result in academic. Some participants also noted improvements in their English language pronunciation.

In summary, this study provides evidence from both perspectives among ISs and ISS Officers that there are differences in adjustment pace, and adjustment skills between ISs who participated in ISS activities compared to those who do not. Therefore, the presence of ISS as a support system is fundamental, serving as a catalyst for better adjustment during their stay in the host country.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This research was conducted under the guidance of assigned supervisors. Prior to participation, all participants were informed about the study's objectives and procedures and provided their written and verbal consent. To ensure the privacy and confidentiality of all participants, their names and affiliated universities were kept anonymous throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. All collected data, including responses and answers, were treated as confidential and used exclusively for academic purposes within the scope of this research.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declared that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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